



2 October 2023

Mr Ben Rimmer
Deputy Secretary
Higher Education, Research and International
Department of Education
GPO Box
Canberra ACT 2601

Email: suburbanhubs@education.gov.au

Dear Mr Rimmer,

Re: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Education's *Consultation Paper: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs*.

The proposed Suburban University Study Hubs build upon existing Regional University Centres which have been found to have increased participation and study outcomes for students in regional and remote areas. We commend the Government for pursuing innovative interventions to widen access to disadvantaged and under-represented cohorts, and for committing to policy that is grounded in a clear evidence base.

The Suburban University Study Hubs have the potential to add to the diversity of Australia's higher education sector. In our response to the *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report*, the University emphasised the need for our higher education system to deliver a broad spectrum of education options to a larger and more heterogeneous cohort of students, and called for a fundamental redesign of the current system to help achieve this. This would involve a shift away from a one-size-fits-all system towards a more varied tertiary education ecosystem made up of research-intensive, teaching-intensive, and vocational training institutions.

A key challenge is to ensure that the different types of institution do not function as discrete or isolated parts, but complement each other, with pathways that allow students to move between them. In addition to improving access to physical higher education infrastructure to those in outer metropolitan areas, Suburban Study Hubs can play a valuable role in fostering partnerships between different types of tertiary institutions.

The University of Melbourne has committed to several partnerships with other institutions, centred on a place-based approach that delivers for students and for local communities:

- **Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership:** Through the Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership, the University works with La Trobe University and GOTAFE and with the local community to improve education and employment pathways. The Partnership has delivered important articulation pathways between TAFE diploma and University degree level studies in Nursing and Social Work, and a 'no wrong door' approach which prioritises easy access to advice and information about both TAFE and university study options. Jointly held events, such as Open Days, emphasise opportunities and connections across the three institutions.

- **Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence (MCRE):** The MCRE was formed in partnership between the University of Melbourne, the Kaiela Institute and the Rumbalara Football Netball Club and will deliver a broad range of VET and higher education courses leading to improved health, education and employment outcomes for Indigenous people in the region. MCRE will build on the existing ASHE partnership that was established in 2004 as a community and educational resource to provide young Indigenous people with an educational setting and support for their transition to employment or further education.
- **End-to-end rural medical program:** The University of Melbourne and La Trobe University have partnered to deliver an end-to-end rural medical degree as part of the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network. Selected students undertake a three-year Bachelor degree at La Trobe's Bendigo or Albury-Wodonga campus, with guaranteed entry into the University of Melbourne's Doctor of Medicine program in Shepparton. The program is helping to retain students in regional and remote areas, and hopefully will address the shortage of medical practitioners in rural areas.
- **Victorian Medtech Skills and Device Hub:** The Medtech Skills and Device Hub is a partnership between the University of Melbourne, RMIT University, Swinburne University, and the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery (ACMD), with the support of the Victorian Government. The Hub brings together businesses, universities, and dual-sector education providers to develop medtech courses, degrees and internships, and will deliver 1,000 industry-based training places, investment-ready start-ups and support for local companies to develop and manufacture medtech products.

The value of these partnerships is that they draw from the unique strengths and attributes of different types of institutions, exemplifying a complementary rather than competitive approach. This expands the options available to students and allows for more diverse student cohorts. There is an opportunity to leverage the proposed Study Hubs to encourage more of these types of partnerships.

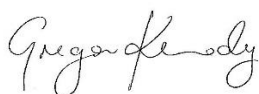
There is also an opportunity for the proposed Study Hubs to offer targeted supports for students from under-represented backgrounds. For example, the Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development, Murrup Barak, supports our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohort with academic, social and cultural services. This culturally safe, responsive and empowering service delivers programs such as the Indigenous Tutorial Access Scheme, which provides free, tailored tutoring sessions for students. The Study Hubs could offer similar services.

While the University is unlikely to seek to host a Suburban Study Hub, we are interested in the possibility of partnering with other universities and tertiary education institutions to participate in a Hub. We are currently considering outer-metropolitan areas where the University of Melbourne could add value to a Study Hub, given our campus locations and existing partnerships and noting the program criteria. We look forward to working with potential partner institutions and with the Government in exploring this possibility.

We will continue to engage with the Government's efforts to widen higher education participation for disadvantaged cohorts, and more broadly on policy and funding reform in the context of the Australian Universities Accord.

For further information or to discuss this submission, please don't hesitate to contact me at gek@unimelb.edu.au.

Kind regards,



Professor Gregor Kennedy
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
The University of Melbourne